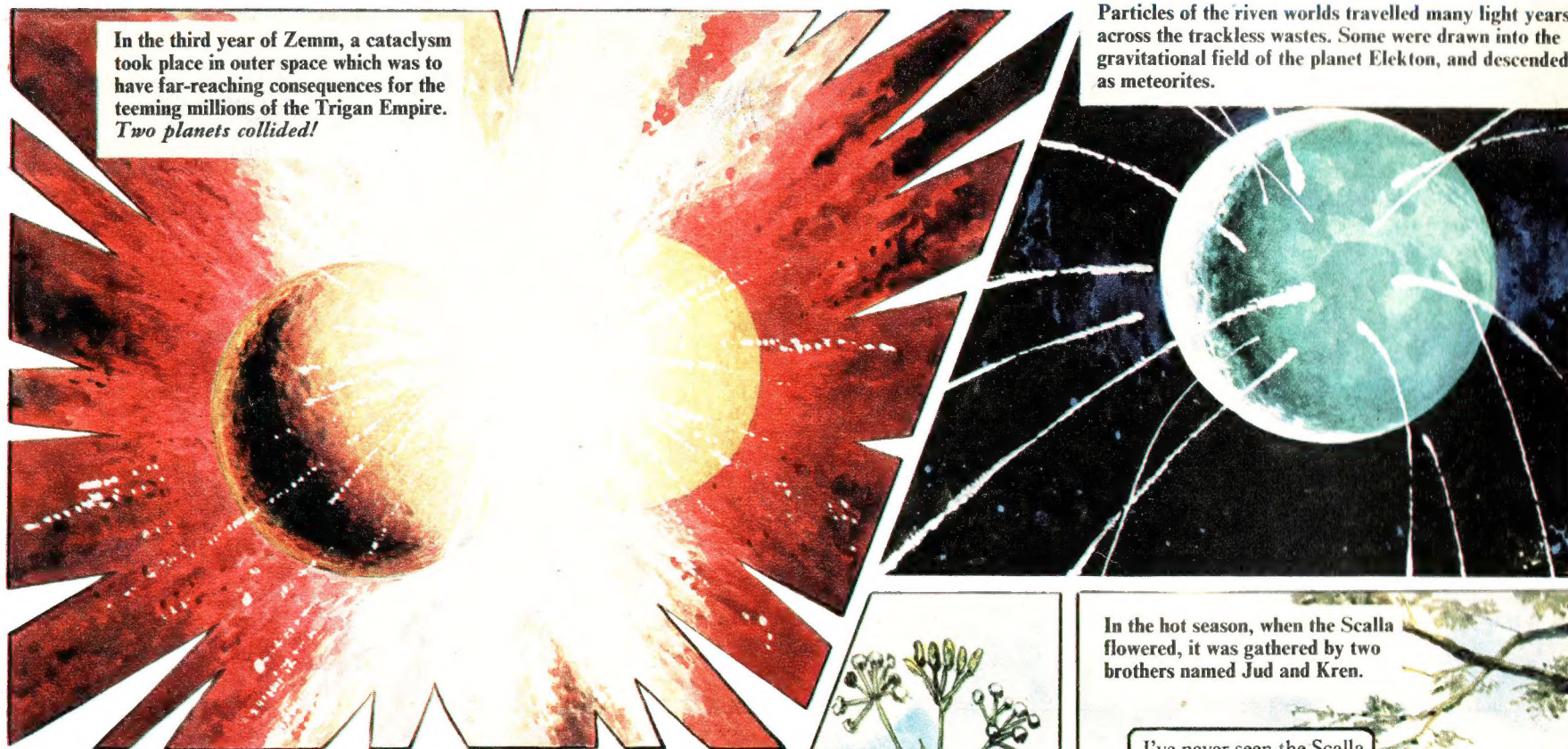


The country of Hericon has become part of the mighty Trigan Empire and is ruled over by the Emperor's son Nikko.

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

In the third year of Zemm, a cataclysm took place in outer space which was to have far-reaching consequences for the teeming millions of the Trigan Empire. *Two planets collided!*

Particles of the riven worlds travelled many light years across the trackless wastes. Some were drawn into the gravitational field of the planet Elekton, and descended as meteorites.



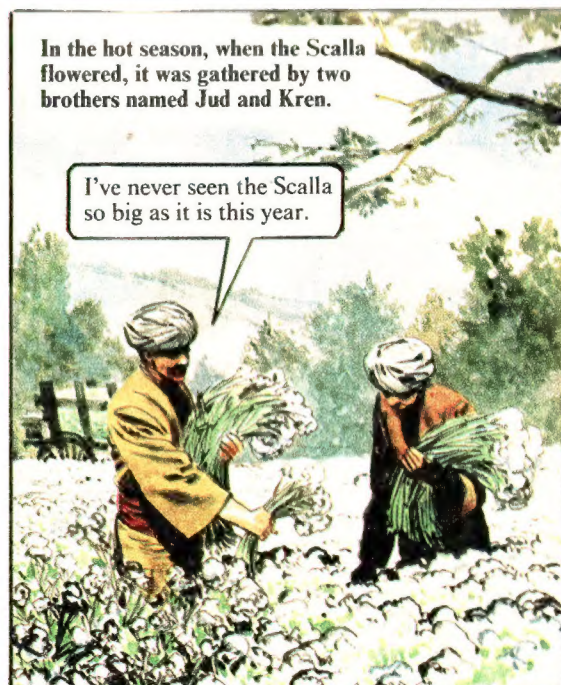
One huge fragment fell in a field in Hericon, close to a patch of common weed which the people of that country called *Scalla*...

Minute fragments of alien plant life which had survived the journey through space joined with the weed *Scalla*...



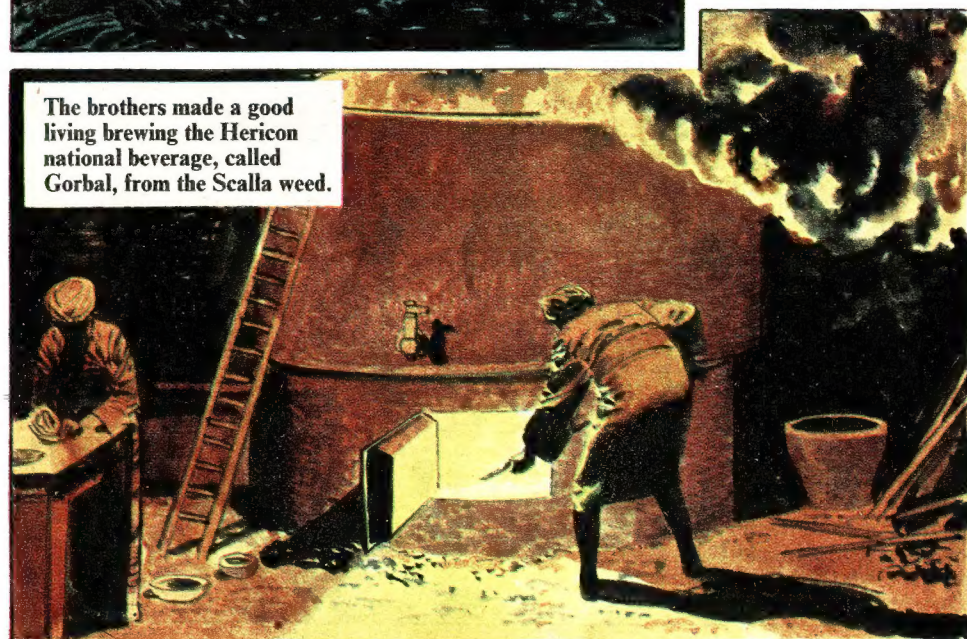
In the hot season, when the *Scalla* flowered, it was gathered by two brothers named Jud and Kren.

I've never seen the *Scalla* so big as it is this year.



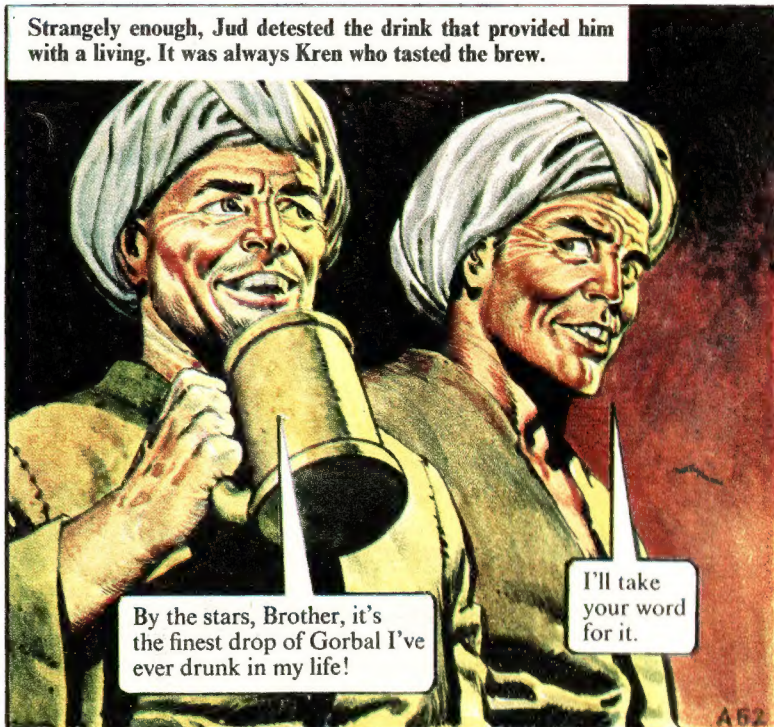
Strangely enough, Jud detested the drink that provided him with a living. It was always Kren who tasted the brew.

The brothers made a good living brewing the Hericon national beverage, called *Gorbal*, from the *Scalla* weed.



By the stars, Brother, it's the finest drop of *Gorbal* I've ever drunk in my life!

I'll take your word for it.



Within a short space of time of drinking that particular brew, a strange change took place in Kren's mind. Normally a simple, kindly man, his brain became ice-cold and calculating...



Business is good... I reckon that our profits for next year will amount to over ten thousand zattans.



That's a lot of money... Pity I have to share it with *him*!

That evening, as was their custom, Jud and Kren went for a walk along the cliff top and...



Now!



AAAGH!



Heh! Heh! Heh!

Kren felt no remorse. This was the effect of the alien plant life on the Scalla weed, from which the Gorbai had been brewed.

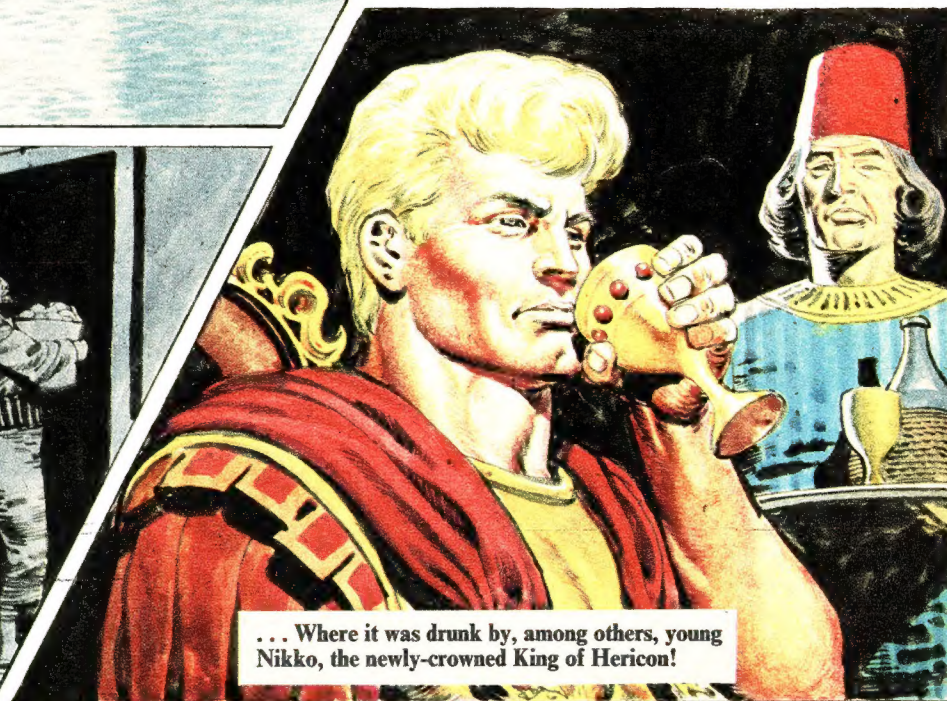
From then on, Kren was in business on his own. Next day, he delivered a consignment of the fiendish brew to the Royal Palace at Hericon City...



Is it a good brew?

You never tasted better.

A52



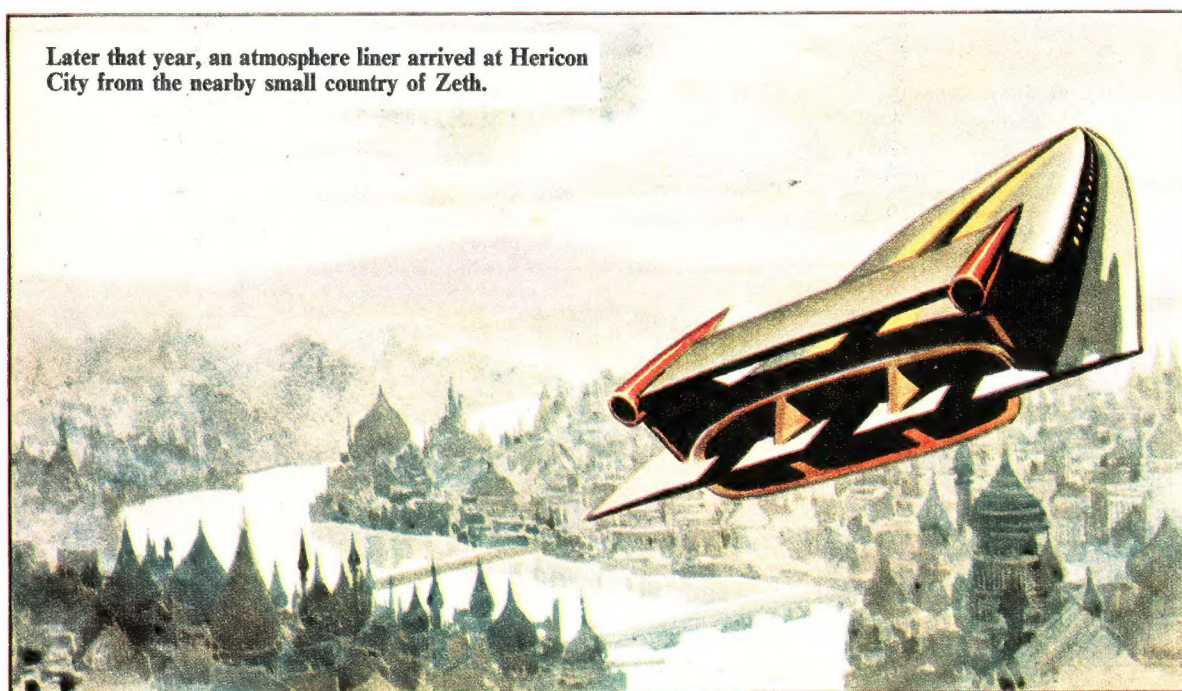
... Where it was drunk by, among others, young Nikko, the newly-crowned King of Hericon!

NEXT WEEK: HOW THE POISONED DRINK EFFECTS NIKKO'S MIND!

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

Following a cataclysm in Outer Space, particles of alien plant life have descended on Hericon and affected the weed Scalla, from which is brewed the drink called Gorbali. The effect of drinking the poisoned Gorbali is to turn men into cold, calculating instruments, entirely without mercy . . .

Later that year, an atmosphere liner arrived at Hericon City from the nearby small country of Zeth.



As King Nikko's aide, Janno greeted the group of Zeth emissaries.

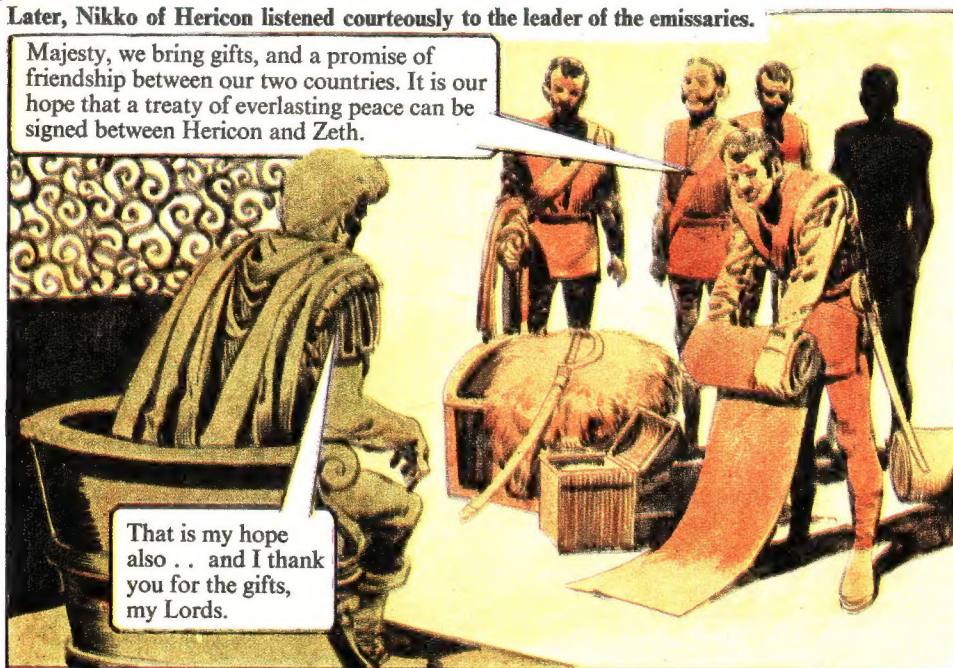
His Majesty awaits you, my Lords.



Later, Nikko of Hericon listened courteously to the leader of the emissaries.

Majesty, we bring gifts, and a promise of friendship between our two countries. It is our hope that a treaty of everlasting peace can be signed between Hericon and Zeth.

That is my hope also . . . and I thank you for the gifts, my Lords.



And then . . .

Join me in a goblet of Gorbali . . . No? . . . Well, our national beverage is not to everyone's taste. My cousin Janno, here, for instance, can't abide it!



And now, to business . . . the treaty you spoke of . . .

Nikko glanced at the draft treaty and signed it. The emissaries left. And when they had gone . . .

Heh, heh, heh! . . . The fools! . . . The gullible fools!

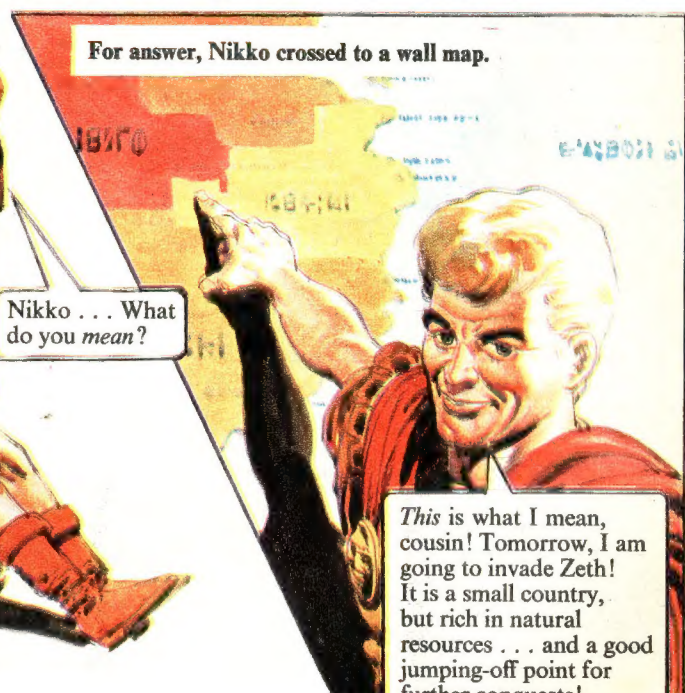
I have a rough draft here, Majesty . . . Perhaps you would care to glance over the various points and make any changes you see fit? . . .



For answer, Nikko crossed to a wall map.

Nikko . . . What do you mean?

This is what I mean, cousin! Tomorrow, I am going to invade Zeth! It is a small country, but rich in natural resources . . . and a good jumping-off point for further conquests!



Janno was appalled!



No! After the treaty you just signed, that would be an act of blackest treachery! And you can't possibly invade without the Emperor's permission . . . which he'll never give!

But—like the majority of his people—Nikko's mind was poisoned by the substance from Outer Space . . .

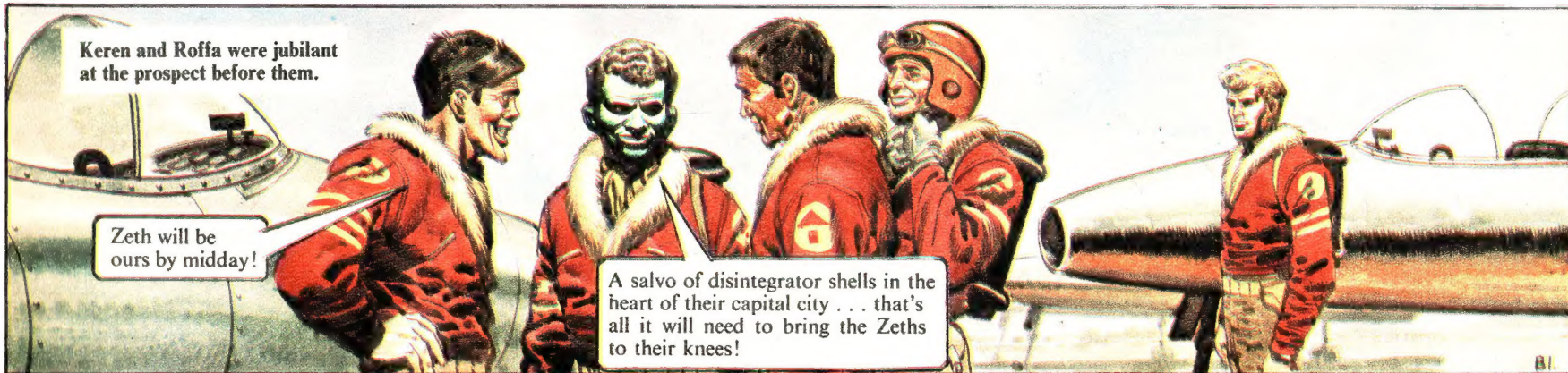


I shall *not* ask my father's permission, but go ahead and do just as I please! And you for one will obey my orders!

At dawn next day, the Hericon air fleet was drawn up in battle order.



Keren and Roffa were jubilant at the prospect before them.



Zeth will be ours by midday!

A salvo of disintegrator shells in the heart of their capital city . . . that's all it will need to bring the Zeths to their knees!



How can they talk like that? . . . They used to be men of honour . . .



Didn't you hear that order?

I did! . . .



. . . And I'm disobeying it!

Place that officer under arrest;

Particles of alien plant life have descended on Hericon and poisoned the Hericon national beverage, Gorbol. The poisoned Gorbol turns men's minds into cold, calculating instruments, entirely without mercy. This has happened to King Nikko. He has ordered his Air Fleet to attack the friendly country of Zeth—and has placed Janno under arrest for disobeying. . . .

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE



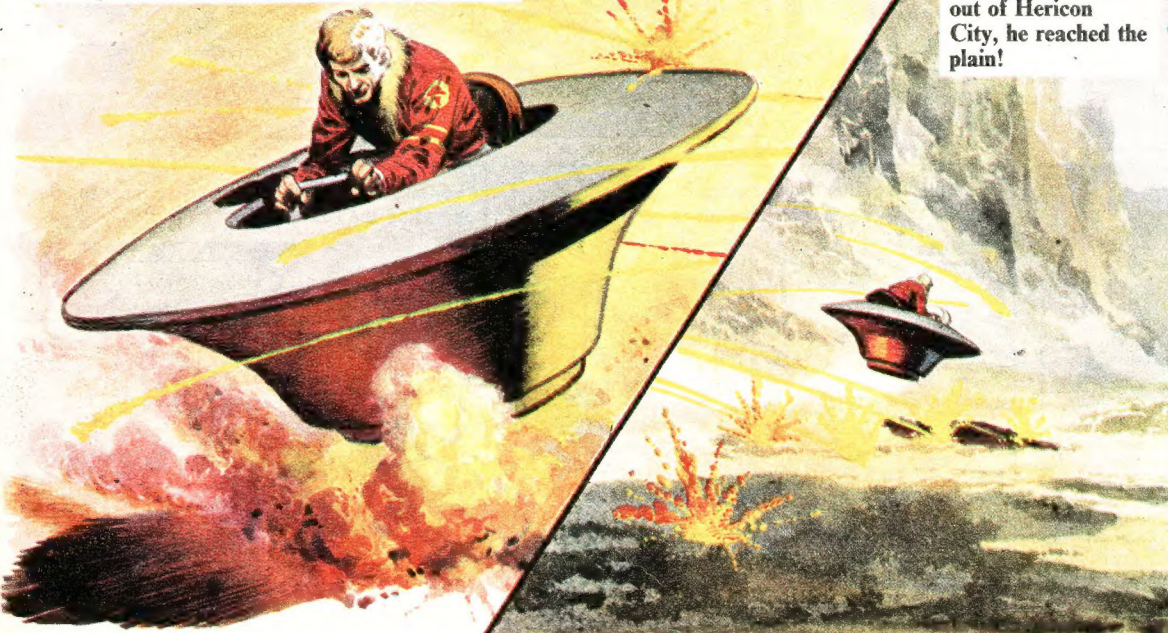
Then . . . he saw his chance . . .



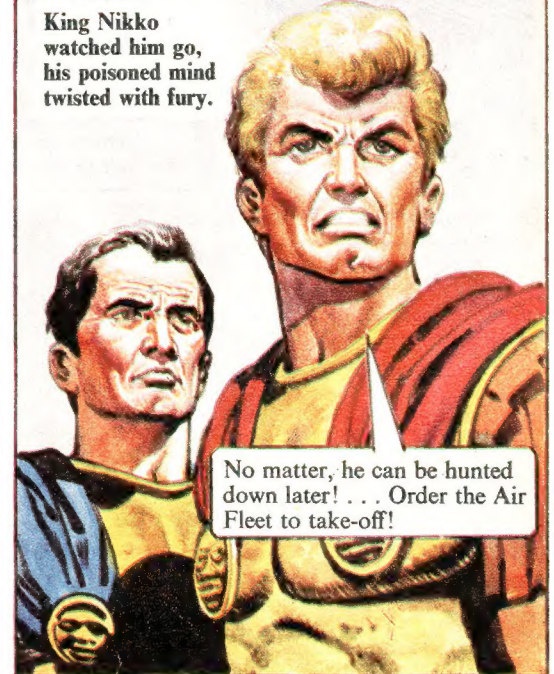
Ahead of him was a one-man Giro-craft. He raced for it.



The engine fired at a touch of the controls, and the craft swept forward as the projectiles began to fly!



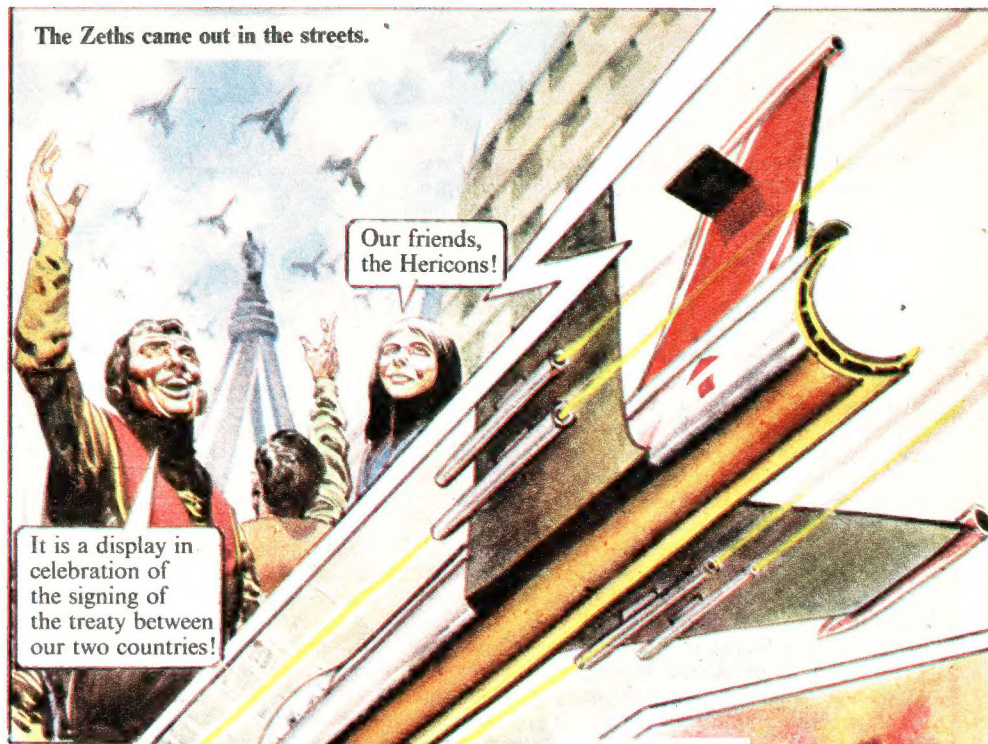
King Nikko watched him go, his poisoned mind twisted with fury.



Zeth was not far from Hericon, and soon, over the unsuspecting capital city of that small country . . .



The Zeths came out in the streets.



Our friends, the Hericons!

It is a display in celebration of the signing of the treaty between our two countries!

And then . . . suddenly, savagely and without warning!



An inferno of fire and destruction!



Aaaaaaagh!

It's an attack!

By midday, the Hericons were masters of the city . . . there was no resistance from the peaceful Zeths.



Meanwhile, far away across the plain, Janno was intent on putting as much distance between himself and Hericon as possible.

My next move must be to get to Trigan and report to the Emperor! . . .

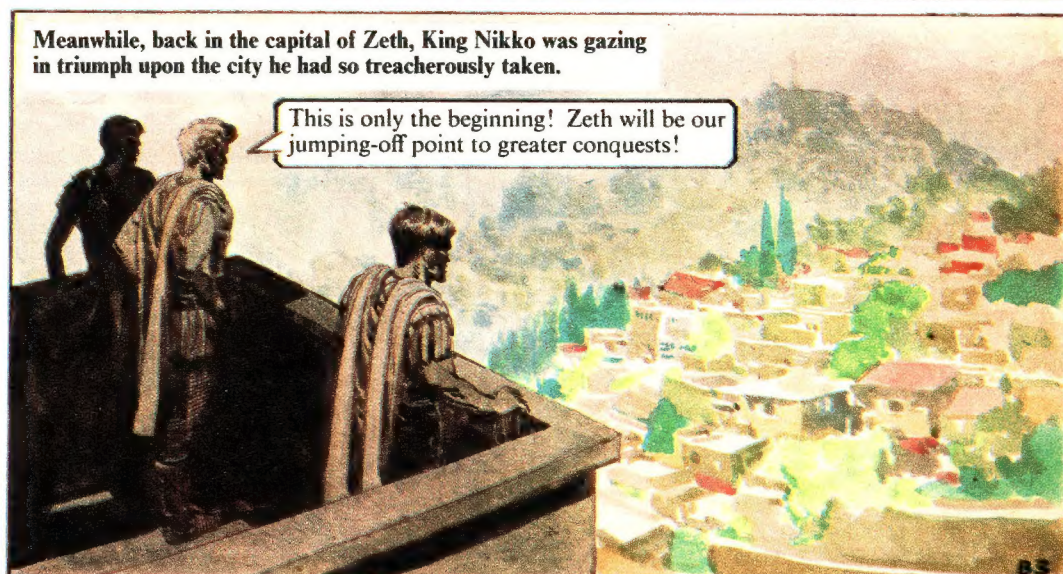
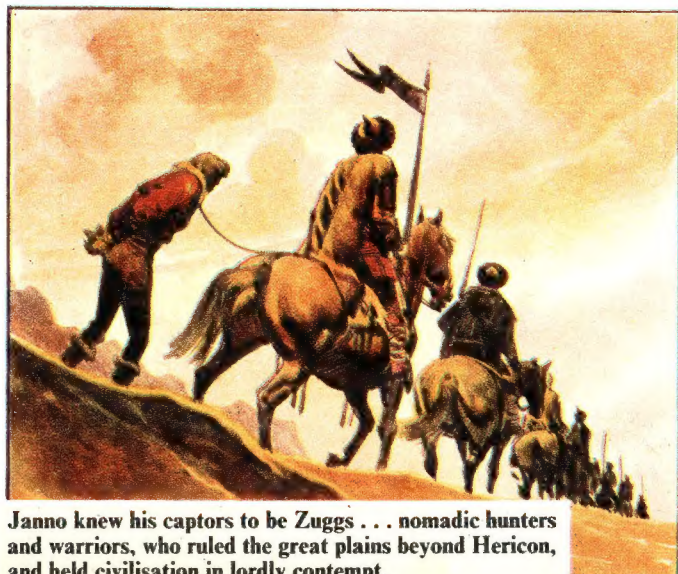
And then, a giant steel net sprang up before him!



Aaaaaaagh!

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

Particles of alien plant life have descended on Hericon and affected the plant used to brew the Hericon national beverage, Gorbol. The effect of drinking the poisoned Gorbol is to turn men's minds into cold, calculating instruments, entirely without mercy. King Nikko of Hericon has treacherously invaded peace-loving Zeth, and Janno has got caught up in a fiendish trap . . .



Like the King, the minds of Keren and Roffa had been poisoned by the sinister plant life from Outer Space.



The Emperor isn't going to like it!

My father can like it or dislike it as he pleases! Nothing he says or does is going to stop me!

News of the invasion had reached Trigan City, and Emperor Trigo was in a towering fury.



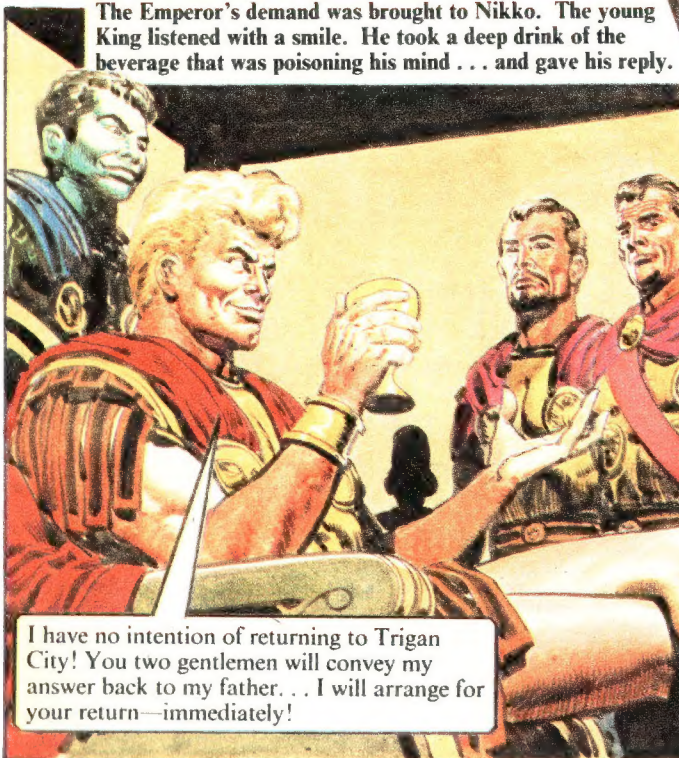
Has the young fool taken leave of his senses? Does he think I entrusted him with the Kingdom of Hericon to set the planet aflame with wars of conquest?

You two! . . . Rilla and Gorth . . . Go to my son! Tell him I demand his presence in Trigan City immediately!



At once, Imperial Majesty!

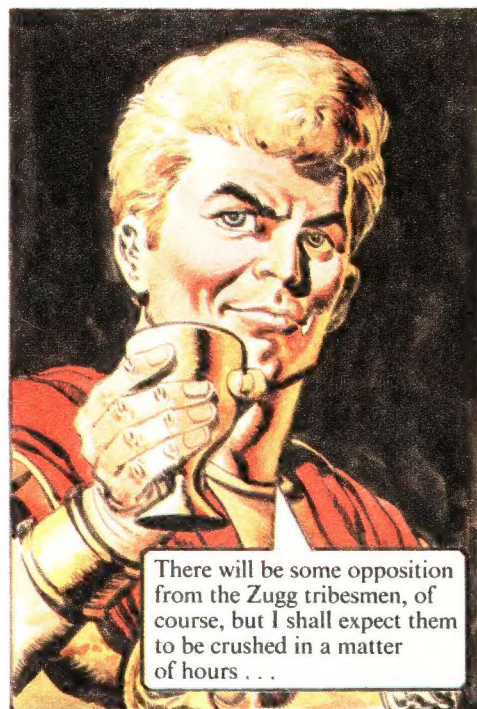
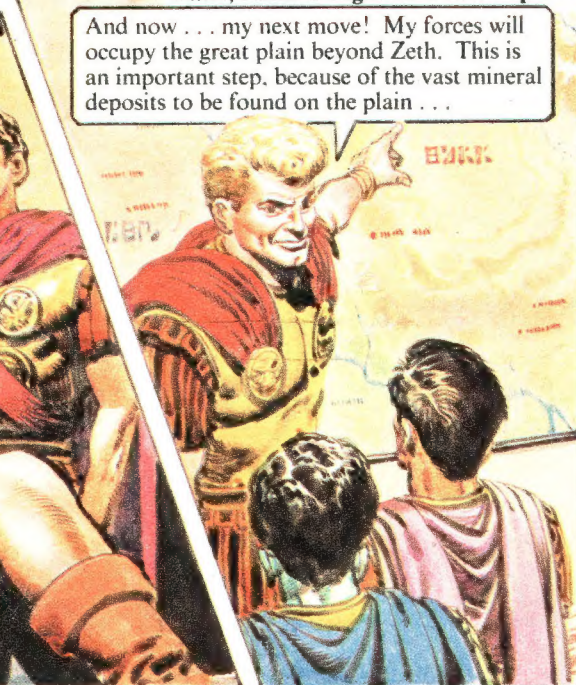
The Emperor's demand was brought to Nikko. The young King listened with a smile. He took a deep drink of the beverage that was poisoning his mind . . . and gave his reply.



I have no intention of returning to Trigan City! You two gentlemen will convey my answer back to my father. . . I will arrange for your return—immediately!

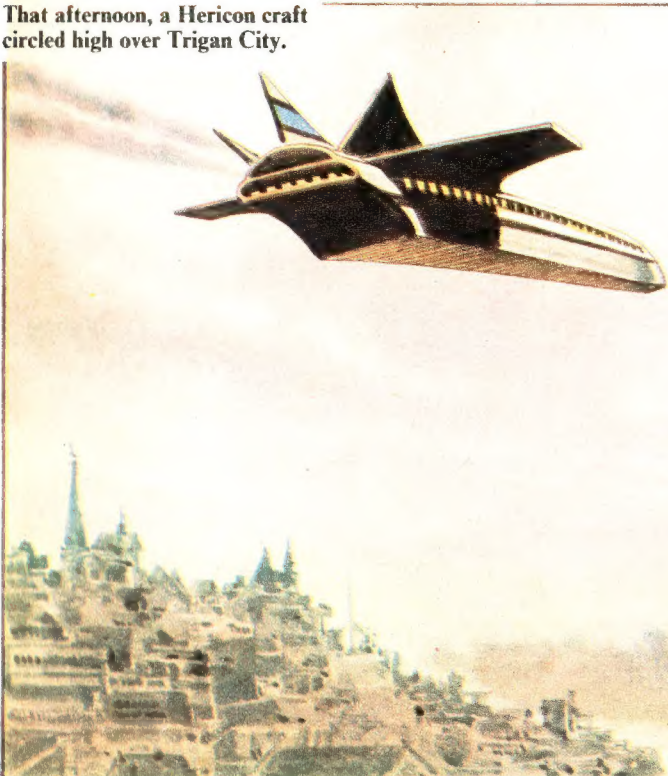
Later, Nikko brought out a wall map . . .

And now . . . my next move! My forces will occupy the great plain beyond Zeth. This is an important step, because of the vast mineral deposits to be found on the plain . . .



There will be some opposition from the Zugg tribesmen, of course, but I shall expect them to be crushed in a matter of hours . . .

That afternoon, a Hericon craft circled high over Trigan City.



And . . .

Give your Emperor the message! . . . Ha!



Nikko's poisoned mind had devised a fiendish reply to his father's demand!

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

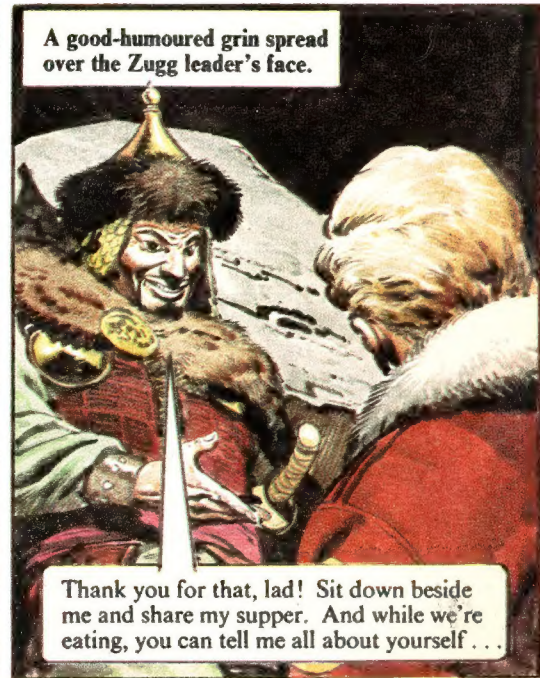
The minds of King Nikko of Hericon and his subjects have been poisoned by particles of alien plant life which have entered the Hericon national beverage Gorbol. To the fury of his father the Emperor Trigo, Nikko has launched a treacherous campaign of conquest. Janno—whose mind is not affected by the alien poison—is a prisoner of the fierce, nomadic Zuggs.



As Jegiz lowered his vast frame to the ground, there was a warning shout!



And then . . .



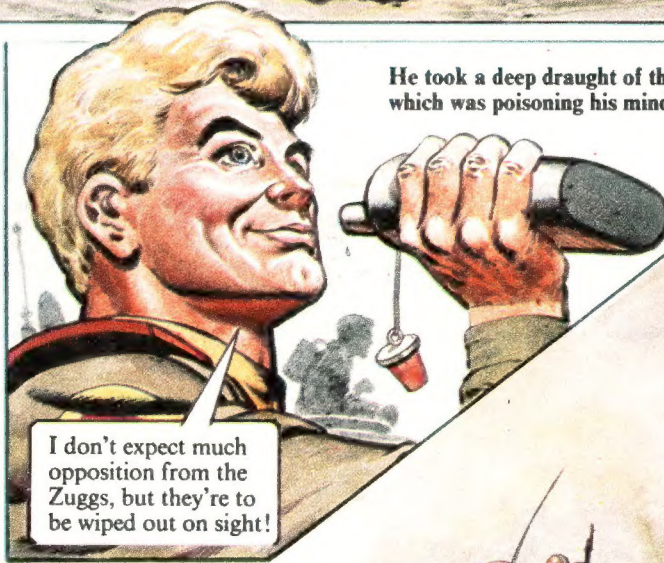


Meanwhile, outside Hericon City, the deafening roar of armoured fighting craft filled the air.

King Nikko swung into the turret of the leading craft.



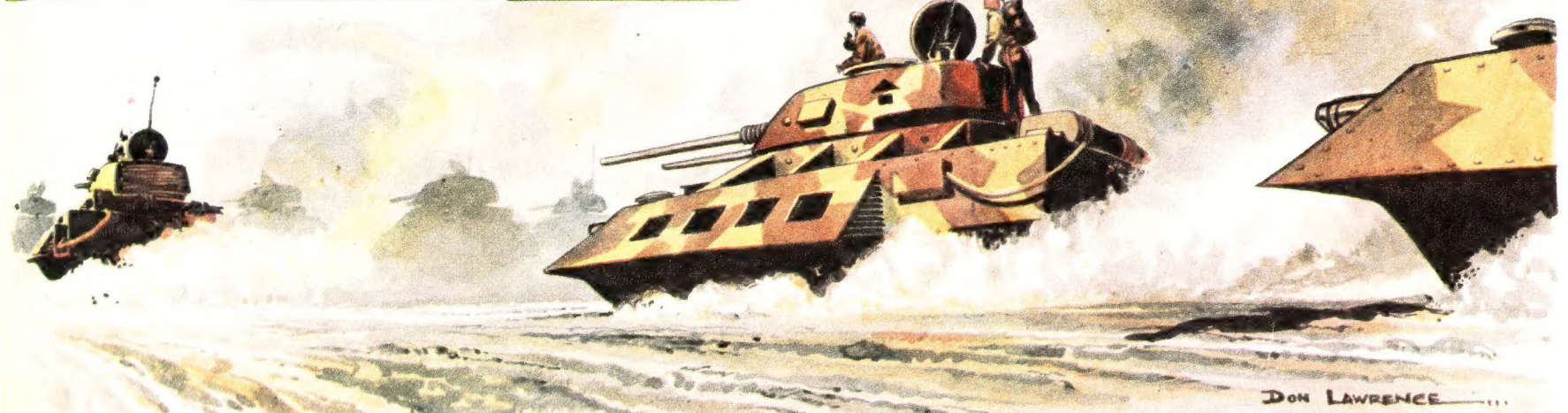
Right! We move out and occupy the Great Plain . . . The operation should be completed by sunset!



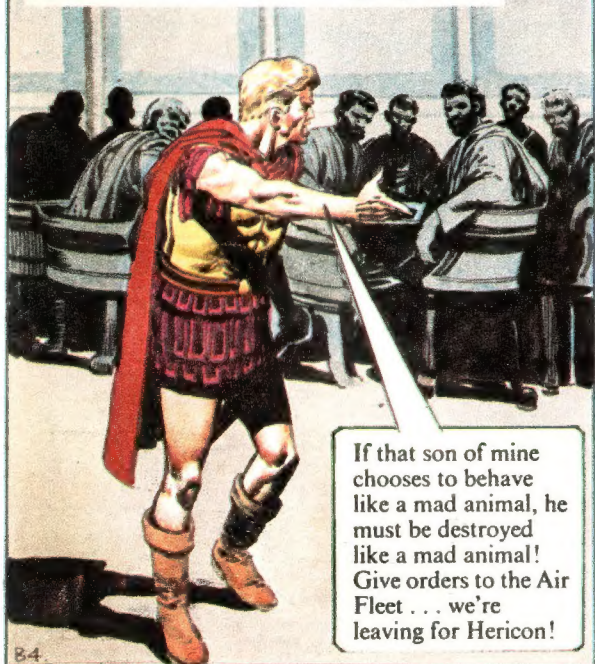
He took a deep draught of the Gorbals which was poisoning his mind.

I don't expect much opposition from the Zuggs, but they're to be wiped out on sight!

An order from the King . . . and the armoured column set off.



Back in Trigan City, the Emperor was striding his council chamber in a towering fury.



If that son of mine chooses to behave like a mad animal, he must be destroyed like a mad animal! Give orders to the Air Fleet . . . we're leaving for Hericon!

And then . . .



Imperial Majesty! News from Hericon! King Nikko is leading an armoured column to occupy the Great Plain!

Is he now? . . . Then, gentlemen, you can forget my last order . . .

There was a grim smile on Trigo's lips . . .



I have fought the mighty Zugg tribesmen on the Great Plain, and I know this . . . the Zuggs will punish Nikko for his folly!

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

The minds of King Nikko of Hericon and his subjects have been poisoned by particles of alien plant life which have entered the Hericon national beverage, Gorbali, with the result that Nikko has launched a treacherous campaign of conquest.

When the twin suns of the planet Elekton sank low in the sky, the Hericon armoured column was deep in the heart of the Great Plain.



Zugg tribesmen sighted the force from a craggy mountain crest.



City dwellers defiling our hunting grounds!

So much the worse for them!

They brought the news to their leader.



Armoured craft are coming this way. Jegiz!

That will be Nikko!

Then the King of Hericon is riding to destruction!

Janno was now an honoured guest of the warrior-hunters. He listened in awe as the Zugg leader calmly addressed his men.



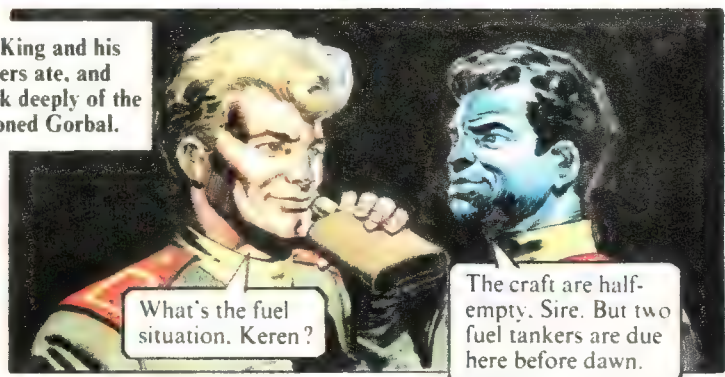
Mount up! We've much to do before dawn. You all know your tasks. By this time tomorrow there won't be a single Hericon alive on the plains!

At nightfall, Nikko gave orders for the column to halt.



No sign of the Zuggs, but we'll hunt them down and wipe them out in the morning.

The King and his officers ate, and drank deeply of the poisoned Gorbali.



What's the fuel situation, Keren?

The craft are half-empty, Sire. But two fuel tankers are due here before dawn.

Far across the plain, two large fuel-carriers sped along.



Gunners! Keep a lookout for Zugg patrols, and shoot on sight!

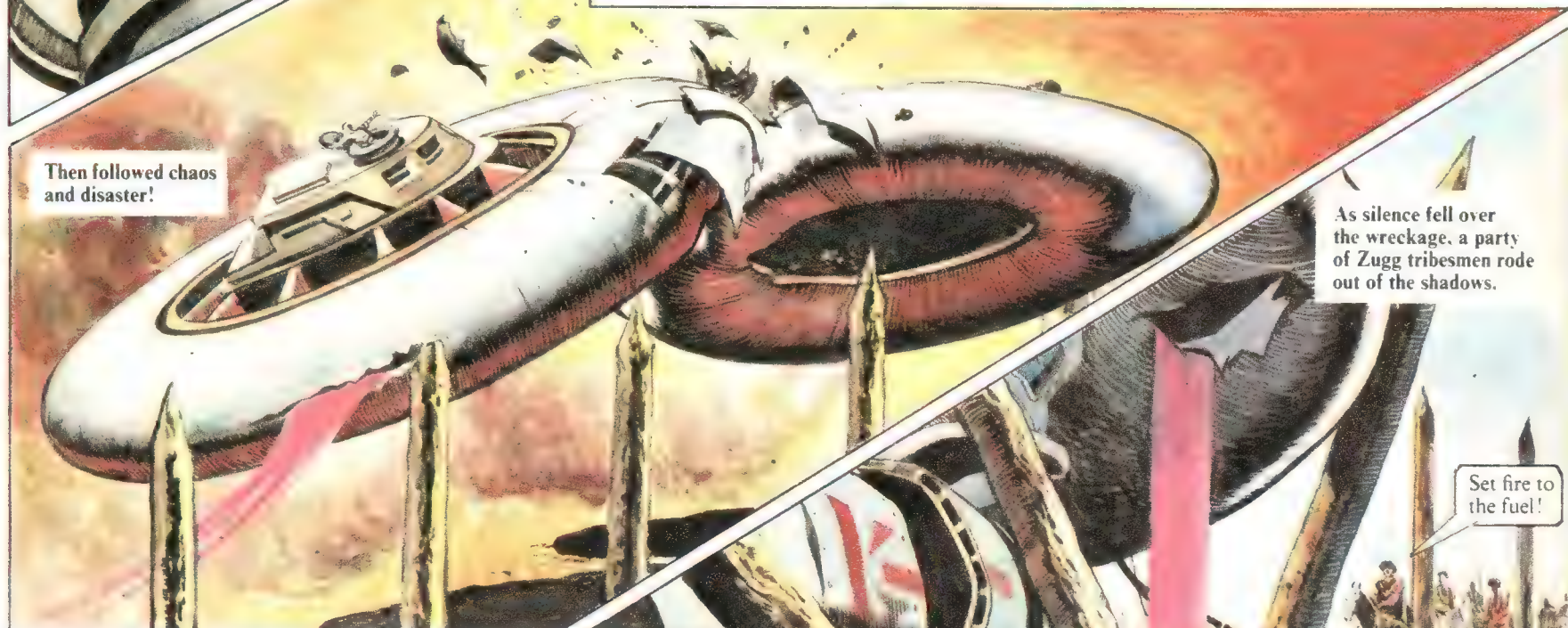


And then . . .

Aaaaaaaah! . . . Stop!
. . . Stop! . . .



A wall of stakes sprang up ahead of the craft!



Then followed chaos
and disaster!

As silence fell over
the wreckage, a party
of Zugg tribesmen rode
out of the shadows.

Set fire to
the fuel!



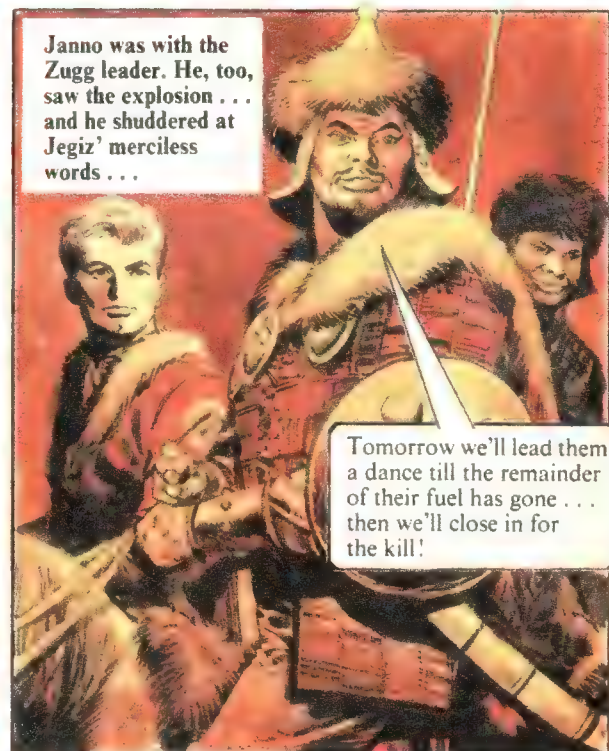
King Nikko of Hericon saw it from afar
. . . a great billowing of lurid flame . . .
followed by a thunderclap of sound.

By all the stars!
What's that?



An officer replied . . . with the cold
finger of fear trailing down his spine.

I believe, Sir,
that was our fuel
blowing up!



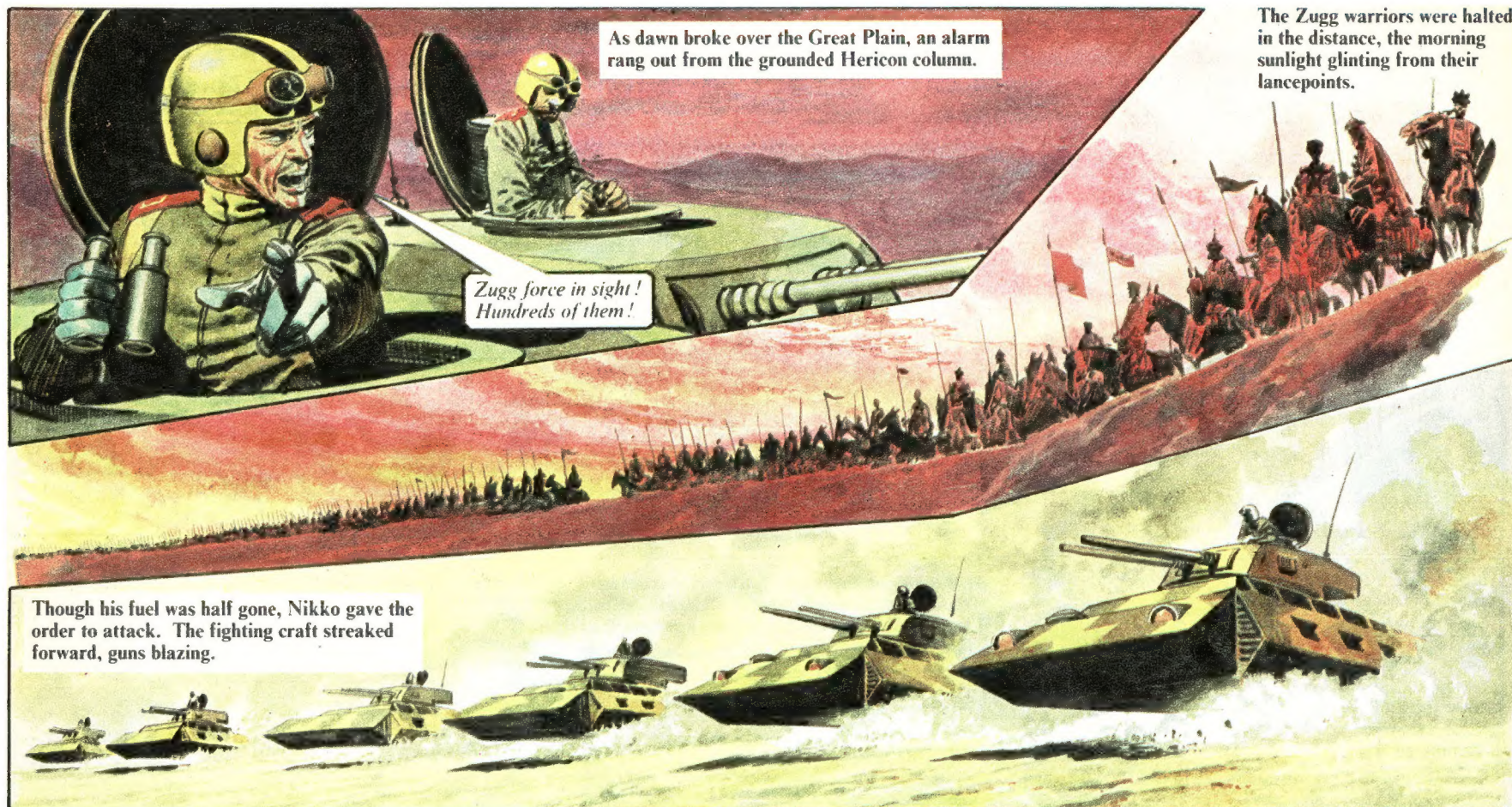
Janno was with the
Zugg leader. He, too,
saw the explosion . . .
and he shuddered at
Jegiz' merciless
words . . .

Tomorrow we'll lead them
a dance till the remainder
of their fuel has gone . . .
then we'll close in for
the kill!

The minds of King Nikko of Hericon and his subjects have been poisoned by particles of alien plant life which have entered the Hericon national beverage called Gorbol, with the result that Nikko has launched a treacherous campaign of conquest.

But the armoured column, which the King has led into the Great Plain, is in trouble

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE



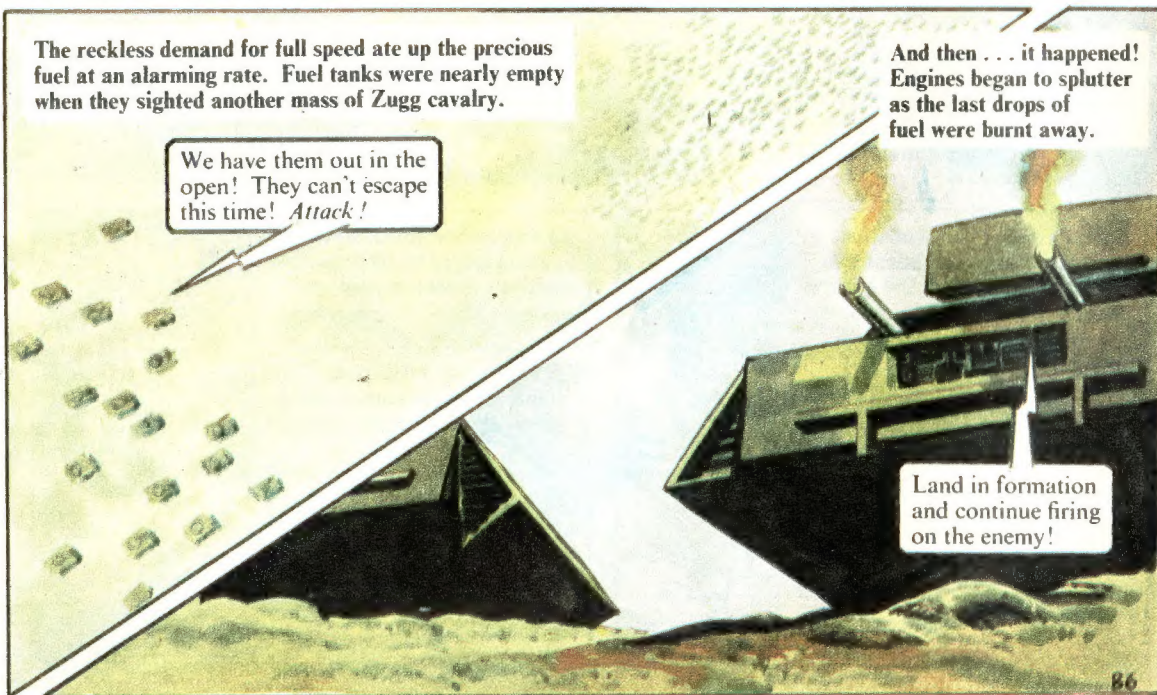
The Zugg warriors were halted in the distance, the morning sunlight glinting from their lancepoints.

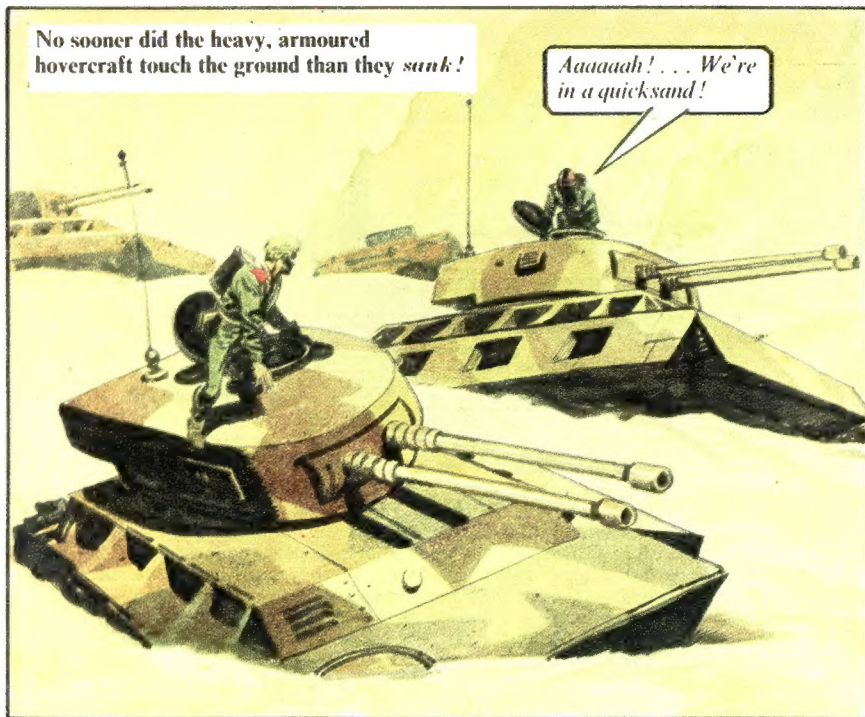


The incident unnerved Nikko. Taking a deep draught of the deadly Gorbol, he shouted another wild order.



The reckless demand for full speed ate up the precious fuel at an alarming rate. Fuel tanks were nearly empty when they sighted another mass of Zugg cavalry.





No sooner did the heavy, armoured hovercraft touch the ground than they *sank*!

Aaaaaah! . . . We're in a quicksand!



Within instants, that proud Hericon force was a shambles of sinking craft and panic-stricken men!

Eeeeeeh! He-e-elp!



Nikko saw Keren floundering to his doom and grabbed his arm. . .



Plunging through the yielding sand, the young king felt his feet touch firm ground . . . he staggered to safety, dragging his burden behind him.

Thank the stars! . . . We're out of it, Keren!

Jegiz watched the destruction of the column from a distance. The Zugg leader's fierce face creased in a grin of triumph.

They fell into our trap, Jegiz! Shall we charge and wipe out the survivors?

Not yet! Let them roast in the midday suns for a while, till they are too weak to fight!

Nikko and the pathetic remains of his force crouched in the pitiless heat of Elekton's twin suns. . .



How long can we hold out, sire?

No time at all. . .



Let's hope the barbarians attack and finish it . . . before we all go mad with thirst!

The deadly Gorbai had all been drunk!

NEXT WEEK: JANNO RISKS HIS LIFE FOR HIS COMRADES

THE TRIGAN EMPIRE

The minds of King Nikko and his subjects have been poisoned by particles of alien plant life which have entered the Hericon national beverage Gorbol, with the result that Nikko has launched a treacherous campaign of conquest.

Now Nikko, defeated by the wild Zuggs, waits with the survivors of his force . . . for the end . . .

When the searing suns of the planet Elekton reached their zenith, the mind of one of the Hericons snapped. . .

Aaaaaaaaah! Water!
Give me water!

Come back,
you fool!

It was then that
Janno urged his
Kreed forward at
the gallop . . .
away from the
Zuggs . . . and
towards the
doomed Hericons.

A Zugg arrow silenced the
man's cries for ever.

Another arrow was drawn
back . . . but Jegiz the
Zugg leader stayed
the bowman's hand.

Die, traitor!

No! He saved my
life . . . let him go
to his own people

Don't shoot, Hericons!
It's me! . . . Janno!

Reaching the shallow hollow, Janno leapt to the
ground and crouched by the astonished Hericons.

Yes, Majesty!

Janno! You deliberately
choose to perish with
us . . . and after what
has happened?

No matter what you've
done, I'm a citizen of the
Trigan Empire, and it is
my duty to stand and die
with my Emperor's son!

The poisonous fumes of
Gorbol were clearing from the
minds of Nikko and his
companions. . .

Why did I begin this
mad, evil war?

Sire! You ordered . . . and we
were glad to obey! . . . and
now we must all pay the price!



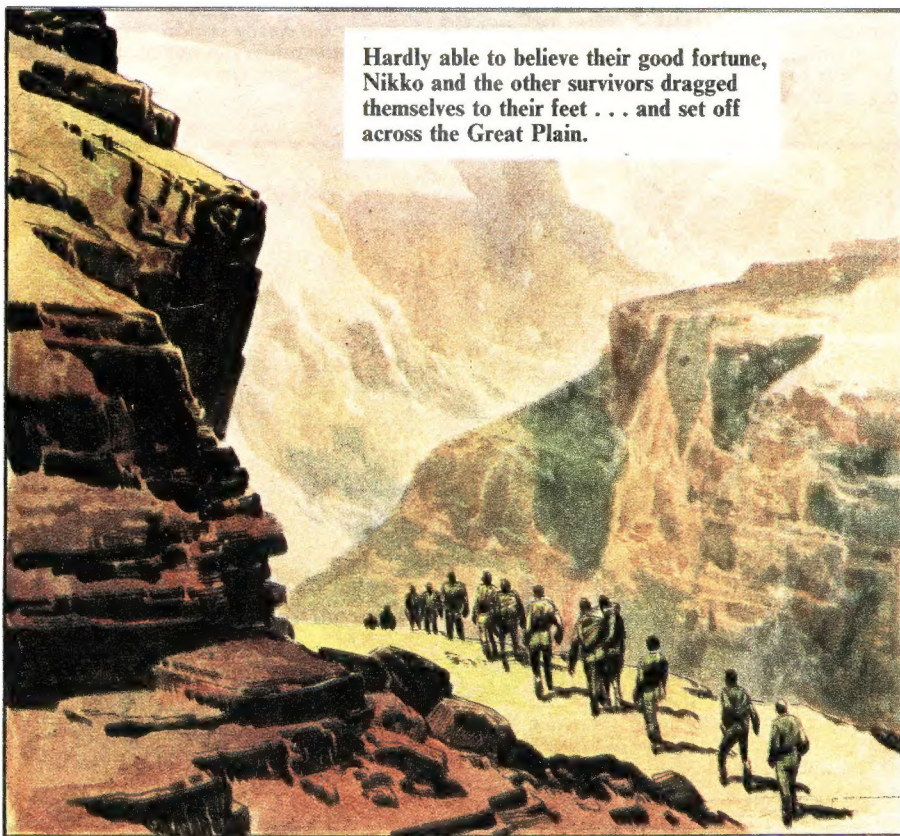
And then . . .

Look! . . . The Zuggs are riding off!

Jegiz the Zugg leader wheeled his Kreed, and cast one glance backwards.



I will spare them all . . . for the sake of the one called Janno, who bravely chose to be with them! Never again will the Hericons defile our hunting grounds!



Hardly able to believe their good fortune, Nikko and the other survivors dragged themselves to their feet . . . and set off across the Great Plain.



Three lunar months later, a group of bedraggled figures staggered into the Imperial Council Chamber at Trigan City.

By all the stars!

The young king of Hericon . . . prostrated himself before the Emperor.



My father . . . I beg your forgiveness for my crimes. . . .

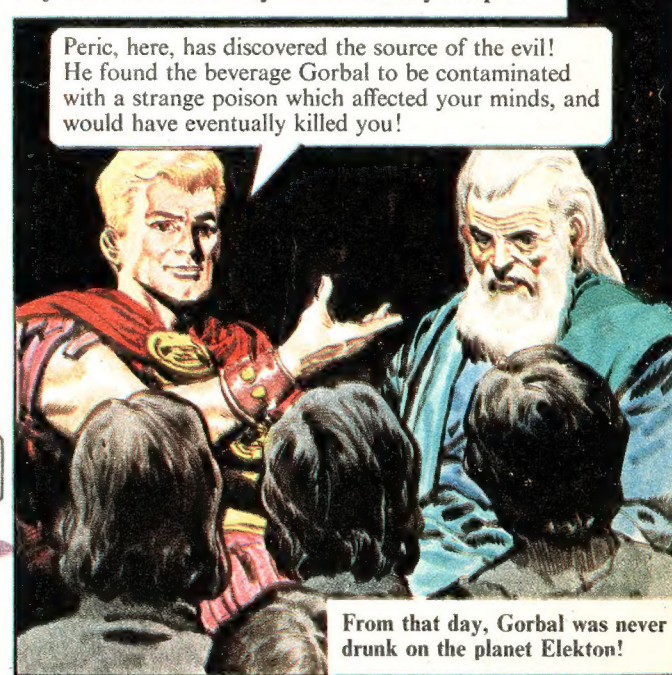
Trigo raised his son to his feet.



There is nothing to forgive, Nikko! You are not to blame for what you did!

I . . . I do not understand. . . .

The Emperor explained . . . and a cold chill of fear ran through the bodies of Nikko and his companions, when they heard of the fate they had so narrowly escaped.



Peric, here, has discovered the source of the evil! He found the beverage Gorbale to be contaminated with a strange poison which affected your minds, and would have eventually killed you!

From that day, Gorbale was never drunk on the planet Elekton!

WATCH FOR A THRILLING NEW CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE TRIGAN EMPIRE NEXT WEEK